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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 000312

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: WAFD PARTY LEADER DEPOSED

Classified by ECPO Minister-Counselor Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: No'man Gom'a, the septuagenarian leader of the Wafd, Egypt's "preeminent" opposition party, was removed in a January 18 vote of the party's central board. Gom'a's supporters stormed the party headquarters in a failed attempt to disrupt the proceedings. Still, Gom'a and supporters are fighting back, claiming the vote was invalid and vowing to expel the disloyal board members. Gom'a's attempts to cling to the leadership of the venerable but faded party are likely to fail. The GOE might welcome the prospect of a rejuvenated Wafd, particularly as it seeks to respond to the Muslim Brotherhood's gains in the new parliament, due in large part to the absence of a viable secular opposition. End summary.

2. (C) Dr. No'man Gom'a, a retired professor of law, was removed from his post as leader of the Wafd Party on January 18 by a 33-10 vote of the party's central committee. The septuagenarian Gom'a had led the party since 2000. Mahmoud Abaza, Wafd Party Vice President and leader of Wafd's five-member parliamentary delegation, has been appointed as acting party leader, pending internal elections. The putsch was led by Christian businessman Mounir Abdel Nour, the son of one of the party's founding fathers. Abdel Nour's feud with Gom'a became public in early January, when the latter ordered his expulsion for "sedition" from the party - an order subsequently reversed by the party's central board.

3. (C) Gom'a and his supporters did not take his removal lying down. The party headquarters, located in an elegant colonial mansion in the upscale neighborhood of Dokki, witnessed chaotic scenes late on the afternoon of January 18 as a crowd of Gom'a partisans stormed in with chants of support. Scuffles between the Gom'a supporters and opponents prompted dozens of riot police to intervene, expelling the crowds from the headquarters and setting up a perimeter outside.

4. (C) Gom'a, who placed third (after Ayman Nour) in the September presidential election, has long been criticized by party members and outside observers for his autocratic and inflexible leadership style, his lack of vision, and inability to appeal to the electorate. Despite his unpopularity within the party, he had previously managed to fend off challenges to his leadership with apparent ease. The ten central board members who voted for Gom'a were quoted in Egyptian media reports claiming that the vote had been taken in violation of party procedures and vowing to expel the 33 who voted against Gom'a for subversion and disloyalty.

5. (C) Comment: The only real surprise in Gom'a's removal is that it took this long. Gom'a's lack of charisma and his dictatorial style have long alienated him both from the party membership and the public. His distant third place finish in the presidential election was viewed as a scandal among the party faithful, many of whom still consider the Wafd, Egypt's ruling party in the King Farouq era, as the country's premier opposition force. While it is not certain that the Wafd will emerge from this infighting strengthened, dumping Gom'a was clearly a prerequisite step toward restoring the party as a viable political actor. The GOE's political leadership might well view a rejuvenated Wafd Party as something in its interest, as it gropes for a response to the substantial parliamentary gains of the Muslim Brotherhood - due both to the unpopularity of the ruling NDP and to the absence of any viable secular alternative parties. End Comment.

RICCIARDONE